

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

November 10, 1972

TO:

25X1

FROM:

A. W. MARSHALL

flm

After our October 26 meeting, Chip and I discussed your plan to review NIEs and to develop techniques to poll consumers. Both ideas are good and I would like to be kept informed as your plans progress. Chip wrote me a short paper presenting our initial ideas on polling consumers.

ATTACHMENT

NSC review(s) completed.

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

November 2, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR A. W. MARSHALL

FROM: GEORGE E. PICKETT, JR.

SUBJECT: Quality Control and Feedback

I would like to comment on your discussion with [redacted] on
October 26 concerning feedback and quality control.

25X1

There is a definite need for a quality control effort within the intelligence community. The danger, however, is that the results of such movements in the past have been to sterilize the product rather than make it more useful. Quality control is frequently misinterpreted as being standardization. Hence, it results in creating a standard set of qualifying adjectives and adverbs, a standard writing style (e. g., the ubiquitous editor), a set of rules and procedures about who has to clear what in order for it to be published, and a limitation on experimentation with new techniques of analysis and presentation. The fundamentals which are most frequently overlooked are that ultimately real quality control is keyed to the consumer of a product and that the diversity of consumers requires a quality control system which allows diversity of output.

An effective system must start from the consumer perspective and work back into the organization, rather than the usual reverse process. Consumers have to be categorized and examined within the framework of a fundamental question: What does each consumer need? Feedback is definitely a problem in making such an assessment, but there are techniques which can be used. In addition it is not critical to talk face to face with each consumer. One can learn a great deal about a man's needs by talking to those around him and by simply speculating about the type of work he does and what he needs to do it.

Having collected data on what are the needs of various consumers (and maintaining a continuous effort to update and expand this information) one can begin to guide the efforts of intelligence producers. The major problem of a standard product can be alleviated by classifying products by the consumers who read them and then outlining the criteria which must be met. This can be provided to both managers and analysts.

Editors can be given more explicit instructions. Several key managers can conduct sample reviews, picking a product at random and evaluating its performance against need. Experimental products can be tested on consumers as intelligence develops a better feel for their needs than they themselves may have. Training material can be modified to increase student awareness that he is providing a service and must be sensitive to his consumers needs. (e.g., It would be interesting to ask students to hypothesize on Kissinger's needs, his time to read, and other sources of information he has; then ask them to evaluate the appropriateness of the material he receives.)

The only bureaucratic aspect of quality control must be the requirement to continuously poll the consumer for his views. This feedback can then be translated into specific guidance keyed to each producer and into criteria to evaluate the performance of analysts and managers. Marketing people (especially those in the publications industry) and business school instructors could provide thoughts on how to poll consumers. They could probably be consulted without requiring major security clearances. I can suggest the following tools in any case:

1. Extremely brief "yes-no" or "scale" questionnaires could be used to reach busy people. Essential information could be derived such as: has he read the document; did it add to his knowledge; were the points clear; did he find it valuable enough to store, etc.?
2. Questionnaires of varying lengths could be used for other consumers. What is important is to construct questionnaires which are brief and keyed to the individual. For example, one type of questionnaire would be used for analysts, one for staffs supporting major consumers, and one for unfamiliar third parties (e.g., consultants).
3. Interviews of varying types can be conducted. Several readers could be interviewed in depth; many could be called on the phone and asked a few unclassified quick questions (simply to know if a document was read would be helpful); sampling could be used to reduce volume of work.

Flexibility is critical. Questionnaires should add or delete items as issues or problems seem to gain or lose importance. Polling should

initially sample the general views of people, then find key problems and pursue these in greater detail. Short and long questionnaires and different styles of interviewing should be intermixed in order to keep the effort alive. Different approaches should be used for the different categories of publications: current products (e. g, CIB), estimates (e. g., NIEs) and special products (e. g., weapons studies).

I do not think it's necessary for the polling of views by intelligence to be a statistically intense, scientifically oriented effort. People can too easily become embroiled in statistical analyses and discussions of the psychological impact of questionnaires. Since the present efforts of the community are so underdeveloped, I think it's far more important that an aggressive, common sense approach toward eliciting consumer reaction be taken. A well managed effort will easily surface major issues and problems in consumer demand.